



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN
Oklahoma State guard Marcus Smart attempts a last-effort jump shot in the final seconds of the Cowboys' 74-71 upset loss to the Wildcats in Bramlage Coliseum Jan. 4.

BY TATE STEINLAGE
THE COLLEGIAN

7
Kansas is vying for its seventh conference tournament title in a decade

The "decade of dominance," as its known throughout Lawrence, has been just that — dominance. Kansas has won six conference tournament titles in the last nine years, and that's not even the most impressive statistic. In those six victories, the Jayhawks have won by an average of 11 points, the closest game being a 2008 matchup against Kevin Durant and the Texas Longhorns.

Head coach Bill Self and company will once again be the No. 1 seed at the tournament, as they try to put a bow on one of the most impressive streaks in college basketball history.

19.8

Oklahoma State sophomore guard Marcus Smart's points per game average since returning from a three-game suspension

Smart's antics with a fan down in Lubbock, Texas were viewed as, well, not his last name. However, the sophomore standout has

By the numbers: Phillips 66 Big 12 Championship tournament

been magnificent since returning to the team from his three-game suspension. The guard's "worst" performance during this stretch of play was a 16-point effort at home against Texas Tech.

With the Cowboys sitting on the NCAA Tournament selection committee's bubble, Smart will need to have a big week in Kansas City to keep Oklahoma State rolling on through March.

21

The jersey number of Kansas freshman center Joel Embiid, who will be sidelined for the tournament

The 7-footer has been nothing less than spectacular for the Jayhawks all season. More than 11 points, eight rebounds, and two blocks per game has rightfully granted Embiid the praise of the college basketball world, and the admiration of a few dozen NBA scouts.

However, Embiid re-injured his back against Oklahoma State on March 1, making him miss the Jayhawks' final two regular season games. Self originally told the Kansas media that his center would return for the conference tournament, but that has since been retracted — Embiid is expected to miss the week's action.

Sophomore forward Perry Ellis and senior forward Tarik Black will be the targeted players that will have to step up if the Jayhawks want to put another conference trophy on their shelves.

2002

Last time Oklahoma won the conference tournament as a number two seed

Sooner Hollis Price was the Big 12 Tournament's Most Outstanding Player in 2002 when Oklahoma won the title over number one seed Kansas at Kemper Arena in Kansas City, Mo.

This year, Oklahoma returns to the tournament as a No. 2 seed, this time under third-year head coach Lon Kruger. Interestingly enough, the Jayhawks are the No. 1 seed as well. Can history repeat itself 12 years later?

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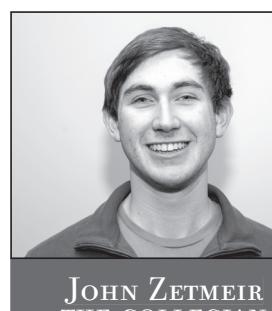
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Ejim, Smart headline Big 12 players to watch in Kansas City



Junior forward Thomas Gipson and Kansas forward Tarik Black fight for the overtime tipoff on Feb. 10 at Bramlage Coliseum.

EMILY DEHAZER | THE COLLEGIAN



JOHN ZETMEIR
THE COLLEGIAN

Iowa State senior forward Melvin Ejim has been everything and more for the Cyclones this season. Head coach Fred Hoiberg likes to run and gun, which allows many different players to score for Iowa State. However, there is no denying that Ejim has been the anchor for his team. The senior from Canada has been named the 2014 Big 12 player of the year after finishing the regular season ranking second in the Big 12 in both scoring and rebounds. Ejim averaged 18.2 points and 8.6 rebounds per game. The senior's best performance of the year came against TCU where he scored a Big 12 record 48 points and grabbed 18 rebounds. The Cyclones will play K-State in their first game of the season headed into the tournament, and will need Ejim to play at a high level if they plan to win three games at

Iowa State sophomore guard Marcus Smart

If you follow college basketball, Smart's name is probably one that you've heard before. He is famous for his antics as well as his play, but since returning from his three game suspension, Smart has carried the Cowboys far. Oklahoma State heads into Kansas City as winners of four of their last five games. In those last five games, Smart is averaging 19.8 points, 5.2 rebounds and 6.4 assists. The Cowboys are one of the favorites to win the Big 12 regular season title this season, but simply could not find much success during the regular season. With Oklahoma State playing their best basketball of the season headed into the tournament, they could show that despite their sluggish regular sea-

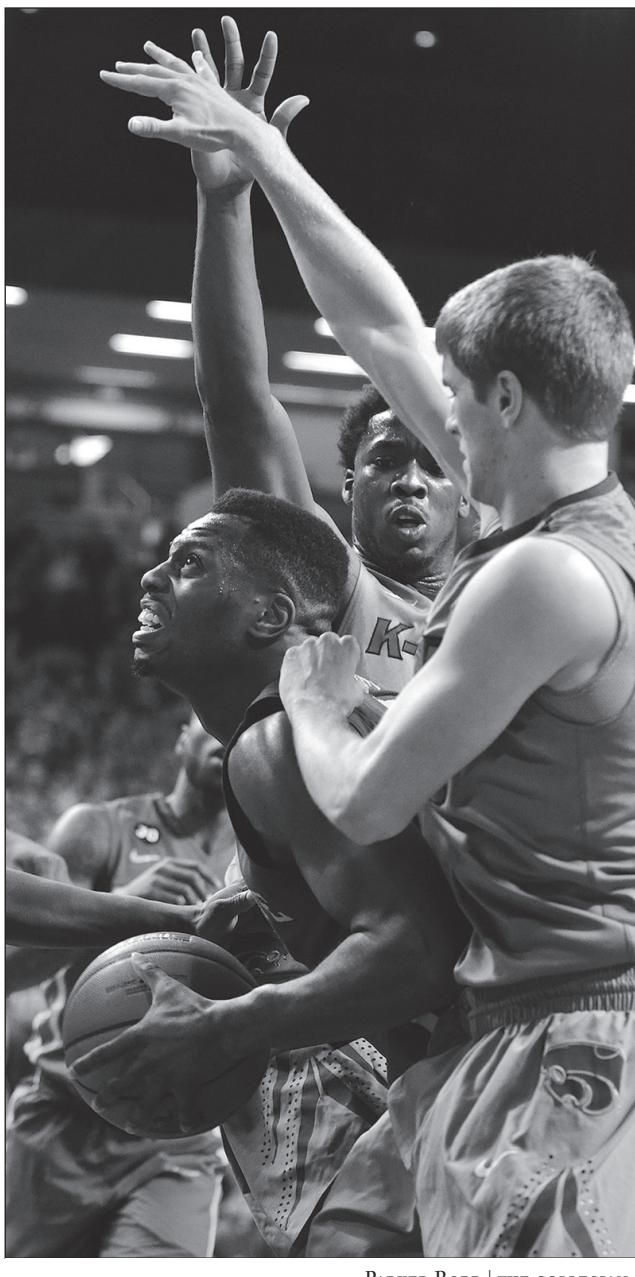
son, they are capable of making an NCAA tournament run.

West Virginia junior guard Juwan Staten

The West Virginia Mountaineers are still fighting for their opportunity to play in the NCAA tournament. A big reason for that is because the play Staten this season. The junior finished the regular season having led the Big 12 in both points and assists this season, and averaged 18.4 points and 5.9 assists. West Virginia is 17-14 this season and 9-9 in conference play. If Staten can will his team to a strong Big 12 tournament performance, it's hard to not pencil West Virginia into the NCAA tournament.

Kansas senior forward Tarik Black

You might be thinking, "Why should we keep our eyes



Iowa State forward Melvin Ejim surges toward the basket as he attempts to plow through the wall formed by junior forward Nino Williams and senior guard Will Spradling in the first half of K-State's 80-73 defeat of Iowa State March 1 in Bramlage Coliseum. Ejim led the Cyclones with 38 points.

out for a guy who averages less than five points and five rebounds a game?" Well, Black must now step up for the Jayhawks with freshman center Joel Embiid out with a back injury.

Though Black has only been asked to play about 12 minutes a game during his lone season with

Kansas, if the Jayhawks want to repeat as conference tournament champions, they will need Black to play well in Embiid's stead.

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